

11/03/2008 This Week In Congress

This Week in Congress

November 3, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." Congress remains out of session, which allows me to travel extensively across our state and visit with many Kansans. The conversations I have with Kansans give me direction in our nation's capital. Today, I will be in Junction City to discuss education issues at the USD 475 School Board meeting and then to welcome anglers to the 2008 BASS Federation Nation Championship, which is being held at Milford Lake from November 5 to the 7. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Mobile Counseling Center Will Bring Mental Health Services Closer to Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced this week the selection of Wichita's Vet Center as a location for one of its new mobile counseling centers. The VA has fifty 38-foot motor coaches traveling throughout each state to bring mental counseling services closer to rural and underserved veterans who otherwise may not have access to this important care. As more veterans return home from combat overseas, innovative approaches are needed to make sure all veterans have access to mental health care, no matter where they live.

The motor coach will be assigned to the Wichita Vet Center and will supplement the activities of Kansas Vet Centers in Wichita and Manhattan, which provide readjustment counseling services at no cost to combat veterans, their families and the families of service members killed in action. The vehicle will have space for confidential counseling and will transport Vet Center counselors and outreach workers to events and activities to reach veterans.

Eisenhower Memorial Commission Moves Closer to Selecting Designer

President Dwight D. Eisenhower demonstrated that our Kansas values of hard work, care for neighbors and service to our community are attributes that can lead a nation out of war and into a time of prosperity. Historians consistently rank President Eisenhower as one of our nation's best leaders. It is only fitting that a memorial be built in Washington, D.C., to pay tribute to his character and achievement.

This week, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission, upon which I serve as a commissioner, announced its selection of seven designers who will compete to create a design for the memorial that will be built near the National Mall in our nation's capital. The Eisenhower Memorial Commission was formed in 1999 to establish a memorial to our 34th President. [Click here](#) to learn more about President Eisenhower and the Memorial Commission.

Learning about Kansas Businesses

Since coming to Congress, I have worked to preserve and protect the way of life we enjoy in communities across our state. The strength of our communities relies in part on having good businesses that employ Kansans and supply products and services to meet our needs. This week, I traveled to several businesses in our state to learn more about their operations and ways in which we can keep these and other employers here in Kansas.

MarCon Pies in Washington: I visited MarCon Pies in Washington on Tuesday. This Kansas business makes more than 60 types of pies. During the holiday season, production increases to more than 1,000 pies each day. The company delivers its pies to customers in Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. Thanks to Don Walsh, owner of MarCon Pies, for explaining to me some of the challenges small businesses such as theirs face.

Russell Stover Candies in Abilene: On Wednesday, I went to the Russell Stover Candies plant in Abilene to see the company's operation first hand. Founded by a Kansan born near Alton, Russell Stover Candies is North America's largest manufacturer of boxed chocolates. The facility in Abilene employs around 600 Kansans and has been a fixture of the community since 1995. Thanks to Craig Brown, plant manager, for telling me more about the operation in Abilene. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

Exide Technologies in Salina: On Thursday, I met with local plant managers and company executives at Exide Technologies' Salina facility. Exide Technologies is one of the world's largest producers and recyclers of lead-acid batteries and operates in more than 80 countries. Since 1974, the Salina plant has been making batteries for automotive and other uses. The plant employs 785 people. Thanks to Bruce Cole, President of Transportation Americas with Exide, and John Pfeiffer, plant manager. [Click here to view a photo from my visit.](#)

Discussing Health Care with Kansas Doctors and Patients

As I travel across our state, Kansans consistently express to me their concern about our nation's health care system. As

a member of the House Rural Health Care Coalition, I recognize the unique challenges and health issues facing rural communities. An aging population, the lack of public transportation and the difficulty of recruiting medical personnel all present special challenges that health care reform must address. This week, I visited two hospitals to speak with administrators, doctors and patients about health care challenges and the successes these small hospitals have had in meeting the needs of their community.

Graham County Hospital in Hill City: On Monday, I went to Graham County Hospital in Hill City. This 25-bed facility has more than 100 employees and offers specialty outpatient clinics for cardiology, diabetes, orthopedic surgery and podiatry. The hospital also utilizes telemedicine to allow patients to receive care from physicians in other parts of the state or even country. Thanks to Hospital Administrator Doug Newman for visiting with me about health care in Graham County.

Scott County Hospital in Scott City: I traveled to Scott County Hospital in Scott City on Friday to meet with President and Chief Executive Officer Mark Burnett. Mr. Burnett and I talked about the importance of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation. Scott County Hospital is a 25-bed facility that has received the CAH designation. CAHs are in rural areas and serve a high percentage of patients on Medicare. This designation provides the hospital with a greater reimbursement for Medicare patients and helps keep hospital doors open. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with Mr. Burnett, his staff and patients.

Visiting with Kansas Students

This week, I attended six different American government classes in six different communities to speak with students about my role as a representative and to answer questions students had about government and tomorrow's election. Civic engagement is an important trait to foster in young people. I have been encouraged during my recent visits with students to learn that the students have been following current events and are interested in the presidential election. It is my hope that these conversations further encourage Kansas students to become active in public affairs.

Thanks to teachers Adam Bedient at Stockton High School in Stockton, Casey Quinlan at Marysville High School in Marysville, Dave Hermreck at Nemaha Valley High School in Seneca, Tyler Nelson at Clay Center Community High School in Clay Center, Abby Maska at Hays High School in Hays and Frank Bean at Garden City Community College in Garden City for allowing me to meet with their students. [Click here to view photos from my visits to Hays High School and Clay Center Community High School.](#)

Honoring Salina Business Leaders

On Thursday, I had the honor of speaking with community leaders in Salina at the fourth annual Salina Area Chamber of Commerce Salina Business Hall of Fame induction ceremony. The Salina Area Chamber of Commerce honored two leaders who worked for the good of their community and not just their investors. S. Dean Evans and Paul Junk were inducted for not only achieving success in business but for also making a positive difference in their community. Mr. Evans is the founder of Evans Grain Company and Mr. Junk is the founder and chief executive officer of Crestwood, Inc., which manufactures cabinetry. Mr. Evans passed away in 1991. His granddaughter, Cathy Lamer, accepted the award on his behalf.

I spoke about the importance of business leaders investing in their community and caring for their employees and their workers' families. The recognition of Mr. Evans and Mr. Junk should inspire others to conduct business as they did, by looking to make their community stronger.

Thanks to Chairman of the Board of the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce Mike Hoppock, Salina Area Chamber of Commerce President and Chief Executive Officer Dennis Lauver and President of Sunflower Bank and Chairman of the Hall of Fame Task Force Larry Britegam for hosting the event. Thank you as well to Charlie Walker, Roy Applequist and Lee Young, recent Hall of Fame inductees for their continuing commitment to the Salina community. [Click here to view photos from the event.](#)

Touring Mosaic in Garden City

I visited Mosaic in Garden City on Friday to learn about the work this non-profit organization does to help Kansans with developmental disabilities. The staff at Mosaic currently provides residential and vocational support and offers community integration and case management services to more than 130 people. I thanked the folks at Mosaic for the work they do to improve the lives of others and offered my assistance in Washington to make sure disabled Kansans are able to get the support they need. Thanks to Mosaic Executive Director Debbie Reynolds, Assistant Director Robert DeLeon, Community Relations Director Lynn Ballinger and Mosaic board members for meeting with me.

Updating Kansas Civic Club Members about Latest Congressional Action

I am always impressed by the number of Kansans that take active roles in making the places they call home better places to live. This week, I went to four civic club meetings in communities across our state to visit with local leaders and report on the latest action in Washington, D.C. I attended my hometown Rotary Club meeting in Hays on Monday where the Hays High School musical cast previewed their production of "Beauty and the Beast." Also on Monday, I spoke to the Lions Club in Lincoln about the economy and other current events. Thanks to Hays Rotary Club President Wayne Woofert and Lincoln Lions Club President Art Wagoner.

Also this week, I spoke with members of the Junction City Kiwanis Club. I gave members a congressional update and answered questions about the economy. Thanks to Junction City Kiwanis Club President Bob Hoover. On Saturday, I took part in the Wells Community Lions Club meal at the Wells Community Center. Thanks to Wells Community Lions Club President Phil Windhorst.

Visiting Kansas Communities

Russell: As I traveled this week, I stopped to visit with folks in Russell on Monday. While in town, I visited Don Dawson Pharmacy, KRSL Radio, the law offices of Driscoll and Driscoll and Main Street Media.

Washington: I was in Washington on Tuesday to speak with local residents and learn about issues important to them. During my time in Washington, I visited with folks at the courthouse, Portenier Chiropractic, MarCon Pie Company, city hall, Kastl-Powell Insurance Agency, the Washington County Record and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Center. I also was able to meet with optometrist Dr. Larry Stoppel.

Ness City: On Friday morning, I visited Farm Credit of Ness City, city hall, the courthouse and Mini Super Mart. It was good to see some familiar faces and discuss current events.

Lindsborg: I took part in a pancake feed in Lindsborg Saturday morning that was hosted by Boy Scout Troop 61 at Bethany Lutheran Church. As a former Boy Scout, I always enjoy supporting Scout events that teach young men important lessons and values.

Ada: I also attended a soup lunch in Ada on Saturday at the local fire station to benefit the youth group. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with folks in Ottawa County.

Barnard: I was in Barnard this week to share a spaghetti dinner with members of the community. The dinner was organized to benefit a local café.

Denmark: I marked the opening of pheasant hunting season on Saturday by joining folks in Lincoln County for the annual Pheasant Hunter Luncheon. This community event kicks off the start of the hunting season and also features a bake sale and crafts.

Antonino: I took part in Our Lady Help of Christians Church's parish German dinner on Saturday in Antonino. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped prepare and serve a great meal.

In the Office

Several Kansans were in this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Pam and Courtney Irwin of Salina, Mark and Barbie Wilbur of Leoti and Charles Wessel of Scott City.

Very truly yours,

Jerry